

Local nonprofits need community support now more than ever

By Staff
staff@swspotlight.com

The pandemic has not spared Southwest Florida. Many of the nonprofit organizations that provide social services and arts and culture have been struggling.

Below are just some of those organizations that need support with donations and enthusiastic volunteers. It's all about neighbors helping neighbors.

Meals of Hope

mealsofhope.org
239-537-7775

The need exploded from the start of the pandemic and continues, according to Steve Popper, president and CEO. The second week of December, Meals of Hope served 4,000 families from its food pantries, up from 1,400 just the week before. The nonprofit continues to need help with financial donations to feed the hungry from its drive-up pantries. Mobile food pantries are located in Naples, Immokalee and Bonita Springs. A donation of \$112 will feed four families for a week.

Pandemic has ramped up need for food, volunteers and cash.

Bonita Springs Assistance Office

bonitaassistance.org
239-992-3034

In April and May of 2020, the demand for assistance from residents of Bonita Springs increased 400%, said Teri Lamaine, president and executive director. As the pandemic continues there is a plethora of needs including utility bills, rent and eviction concerns. BSAO added a pet food pantry



The need for food and help with utility bills and rent continues.



Meals of Hope mobile food pantries are located in South Lee County and Collier County and provide fresh produce as well as nonperishables. The need has increased during the pandemic.

containing items SNAP benefits can't buy. Depression, domestic violence and alcohol abuse have increased, so BSAO partnered with Lee Health to offer mental health screenings on Wednesdays. Donations of non-perishable food can be dropped off at 25300 Bernwood Drive, Unit 6, Bonita Springs. A donation of \$50 would help one elderly person get supplemental food he or she needs once a month.

Interfaith Charities (Estero/San Carlos Park United Way House)

icslee.org
17592 Rockefeller Circle, Fort Myers
239-267-3510

This nonprofit "feeds the people and pays the bills." It provides food to 300 Lee County families a week with its food pantry which has been a drive-through during the pandemic. Utility bills of clients who need assistance average \$200 a month. If five friends were to donate \$200 each, they could help several clients pay their electric bills and prevent a shut off. Donations can also help IC purchase food for the pantry.

Café of Life

cafeoflife.org
239-495-9325

At the Café of Life a hot nutritious meal is provided weekdays for take-out along with a bag of groceries, fresh produce, paper products, diapers and hygiene products. Deliveries are also made to low-income neighborhoods, migrant camps and to needy seniors' homes. On a daily basis, 90 hot meals are provided. As some mobile food pantries wind down, Jeff Nichols sees more demand with an increased need for food donations. A donation of \$100 will provide 25 hot meals.

Community Cooperative Meals on Wheels

communitycooperative.com
239-337-1055

With the growing need for meals to be delivered to homebound neighbors who cannot cook or shop for themselves, CC is returning its Meals on Wheels services to five days a week. Volunteers are needed to serve throughout Lee County. Community Cooperative has over 30 meal delivery routes, which include the Bonita Springs area, and provides daily nutritious meals, groceries, pet food and friendly safety checks. For more information on volunteering or donating go to its website.

Shelter for Abused Women and Children

naplesshelter.org
239-775-3862

The pandemic has impacted The Shelter in several ways. The many

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Meals of Hope volunteers fill trunks with food at St. Mary's Episcopal Church in Bonita Springs.

events that it relies on for revenue to fund its programs and services have been temporarily postponed and the thrift shop, which had been shut down, lost sales and revenue as well. The thrift shop has now opened its doors and is welcoming shoppers yet they have still not been able to catch up, said Linda Oberhaus, chief executive officer. The pandemic marked higher than normal domestic violence incidents but because victims were sheltering at home with their abusers they were not able to make calls on the crisis hotline. To remedy this, The Shelter developed a text line so victims could discretely text an advocate to help devise a safety plan. That will continue beyond the pandemic, said Oberhaus.

Currently there are 28 adults and children at the Naples shelter and 38 at the Immokalee shelter with their pets in the shelters' kennels. Monetary donations would be welcomed as well as donations of clothing, gently used household items and furniture at the thrift store (The Shelter Options Shoppe, 968 Second Ave. North, Naples). And Santa did know where to find the children for Christmas: Toys and gifts were collected for The Shelter children by Cosmos's Ristorante and The Naples Police Department.

Literacy Council Gulf Coast

literacygulfcoast.org
239-676-5202

The Literacy Council Gulf Coast teaches English to families and adults to help them succeed and to strengthen communities. There is no charge for classes. According to Susan Holman Schad, president and CEO, LCGC shut down on March 16 and re-opened on May 4. Since then it has been growing its programs very slowly due to lack of enough tutors. It opened two of its off-site programs this fall and staff members are very happy that they are taking baby steps to get back to teaching more students. They sanitize, have masks and practice social distancing. The council's biggest needs include volunteers and donations. A donation of \$200 will cover the expenses of teaching one student for an entire year.



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